

"Declaration Day"

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

July 4, 2010

There is a great story about a church that was struggling with coming up with money to pay for some critical repairs that needed to be made to their building. The pastor struggled with how to share the need with the members of the congregation in such a way that they would understand the need and respond. As the pastor arrived at the church, his mind preoccupied with money matters he learned that the regular organist was sick and had called on a substitute that was waiting at his office door hoping to get instructions from the pastor. He was annoyed by the last minute change and how it put things a bit up in the air but he grabbed a copy of the service and gave it to the substitute. "Here's a copy of the service," he said impatiently. "But, you'll have to think of something to play after I make the announcement about the finances. I don't know how I am going to do that and I don't have time to figure it all out now."

When the time was right during the service, the minister paused and said, "Brothers and Sisters, we are in great difficulty; the roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected and we need \$4,000 more. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more, please stand up." At that moment, the substitute organist began playing "The Star Spangled Banner." And that is how the substitute became the regular organist! There are just times when we need to stand. When we are moved by gratitude - - when we are stirred by respect and pride in a nation that has cradled us and our families in a place guided by principles of freedom, justice and right, principles of morality deeply rooted in a belief in God.

This past week I was able to spend some time with Jr. High aged kids at Confirmation Camp at Camp Metigoshe. On one occasion we were talking about worship and why more and more people are becoming less involved with the church. We talked about the things we do in worship and the things that we should do differently. One student asked why we have to stand up so much. I tried to explain that when we stand up it is done in honor, awe or respect. The gospel is read - the word of God And so we stand to show our respect for that word and to acknowledge that God speaks to us. We believe that God is coming to be among us and is present in our midst We stand to honor Him and sing His praise. As God pronounces forgiveness or blessing we stand in awe of God's mercy and love.

Another student asked if people are becoming less involved why is it that we don't talk to them and get them to come back. And I thought Yes, that is the question. Why don't we say something about what we believe to be true and important? If we stand in awe and respect for God, why don't we say something about it to those around us?

In our Gospel text today Jesus appoints 70 followers to go and take a stand. Seventy people who were convinced that there was something so special about who Jesus was and what Jesus was teaching that they were willing to go out and say something to people they may or may not have known. They put their lives in God's hand and went. And amazing things

happened. Not everyone was willing to welcome them but for those who were willing to listen, Jesus suggests that it is as though the speakers were becoming the voice of Jesus Himself "Whoever listens to you listens to me" Why is it that we are so reluctant to speak about that which we deeply believe in ... That which we honor each time we stand in this place?

It was interesting to read about Edith Shain recently. She passed away recently at the age of 91. And even though we probably did not know her name we all knew her by the photo which became a symbol of the end of World War II. You know the photo taken in Time Square on V-J Day in August of 1945 where a returning sailor sweeps a nurse into his arms and kisses her. She was 27 years old at the time, but it was not until she was 60 that she actually confessed that she was the lady in the picture. Until that time, she did not feel it was dignified to receive such notoriety. For 33 years she did not talk about what she knew to be true. But finally she spoke and she was asked what the picture meant to her. She said, "It says so many things. Hope, love, peace and tomorrow."

So often we say so little about those things that are most sacred and important to us. I don't know why we are so reluctant to speak and share what we know to be true. I wonder if we are afraid of how people might respond. Will they reject us if we talk about God? Will they ask questions that we might not know how to answer?

What does that picture from the end of the war in 1945 say or mean to you? I bet we could all come up with some response. How about if the question had to do with the Star Spangled Banner or the flag? Would you know what to say? And what if the question had to do with God? In your responses would we hear words like hope, love, peace, and freedom?

It is interesting to note that Jesus told the 70 what words to speak when they went out. The first word that was to be spoken was the word "peace".

Today we celebrate. There will be lots of gatherings and hot dogs and potato salad. Hopefully there will be some talk to about what it is that we are celebrating. I ran across an article that share 'fun fact' to note on this 4th of July. It included such things as the fact that the chances are 1 in 3 that the beans you eat today on your 4th of July picnic were grown in North Dakota. Or that ... even though the United Kingdom was our adversary in 1776, they are now our 6th largest trading partner with \$93 Billion of trade with that nation. Or that we exported \$209 Million worth of fireworks from China in order to celebrate the 4th in 2009. Or we might note that there were only 2.5 million people estimated to be living in our new nation in 1776 and there are 309.6 million today. All good things to talk about but perhaps we might also talk about freedom, hope and peace. We might also talk about the beauty and blessing of a nation that is home for many of us. But, on this day perhaps we should also talk about the fact that this is 'declaration' day. It is really inappropriate to say that this is 'independence day' because this is not the day that independence came. On this day people with strong beliefs stood up and that spoke. They made a declaration. There would be 7 long years of struggle that would follow before the

new nation would sit down to write a constitution. But on this day, someone stood up and said what they believed.

What are you willing to stand up for? For what are you willing to open your mouth and declare what you believe to be true. Will you speak for hope, peace and freedom? These are the gifts of God that come to us and give life. Will we be among the 70 to stand up and see Satan fall from his stronghold and the kingdom of God advance?

AMEN